

Incorporating Futures Foresight Into Strategic Renewal In Sports Business

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Research aim

Futures foresight is a common practice in societal and business development. The importance of anticipation has been described as higher “clock speed” in development (e.g. Fine, 1998). Individual business — amodels and products have shortened life-cycles, sports business being no exception.

The research applied futures research methodology to envision key drivers of change to sports business up to year 2025. The aims were: 1) To source and assess the emerging trends affecting sports business (their probability, effectiveness = impact potential and plausibility to sports business) 2) Envision the consequences of these trends 3) Assess the research process and find ways to develop futures foresight practices for sports organizations.

Theoretical background

Managerial decision-making can be categorized — following Mintzberg (2000) — to a) opportunistic; decisions based on prevailing knowledge and recourses, and where decisions have a weak linkage to future b) strategic; somewhat predictable conditions but in a timeframe that allows rearranging and acquisition of resources and c) visionary; creating and maintaining competitiveness in an uncertain environment, where new competencies and resources need to be deployed.

For survival and success organizations need to be proactive . As de Jouvenel (1963) noted, individuals and organizations hold “futuribles” — images of mind that are not based on data, but are potential states of things-to-be. Some of these futuribles catalyze capitalization of the opportunities or minimization of damages of change.

Traditionally futures research as a field of study has been directed towards societal betterment, finding issues and strategies for long-term development of common good. Strategic business development has focused of improvement of share/stakeholder value of the organizations as individual units. Including both researchers and practitioners of sports business to the informant pool should give a more balanced view and address the common issues for both angles. Larger dataset would be needed for reliable analysis on tensions between the angles.

Methodology, research design, and data analysis

The main approach was Delphi-method based on multiple rounds that condense and deepen the knowledge gathered. In the collection, analysis and presentation of the data and results also the methods of Multiple Perspective Analysis and Future Wheels (Glenn & Gordon, 2003) were utilized. In the last stage, Technology Radar-method was modified to a new tool — Future Radar. The respondents in the study were stakeholders in the Finnish sports business community (practitioners, researchers, educators). Triangulation was used both in mixed-method approach as well as researcher triangulation, more than one researcher in all stages analyzed data, reflected the findings and planned the road ahead.

The main steps of the research were:

3. Crowdsourcing the trends — November 2015 Sports Business School Finland-seminar — some 40+ respondents
4. Combining the content-wise future trends, reformulating the statements for readability and usability
5. On-line survey assessment: The probability of the trend (of coming true), the effect (strength of the impact), desirability (positive or negative) to sports business — 20+ respondents
6. Selection of 6 key trends, based on the overall scoring in Step 3. Visioning the first order (= direct) and second order (deriving from the first) of the selected trends — 13 respondents
7. Creation of Future Radars based on Step 5 Results, discussion, implications/conclusions

Based on the results it can be stated that sports business is likely to live through significant changes in the timespan covered. The changes take place in all perspectives: Technological, Organizational and Personal. Also the effects of these changes will touch all perspectives, and the consequences of the trends are numerous and versatile. Researchers recommend actors in sports business to select small amount of trends and consequences for their own strategy formulation and discussion since the data from a national study with limited pool of respondents was already rich in volume and variety.

The researchers also observed difficulties in fostering data creation via online means, leading to a lengthened research process. Obviously modern tools should be developed enabling respondents to focus on the content over format as and see the big picture of the research and its aims. This would smoothen both the academic process as well as the pragmatic strategic development in sports. New tools would allow wider sampling, that would positively impact the quality.

References

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